



2-11-1987

Route 66: From Beale to Bypassed

Michael J. Wurtz

University of the Pacific, mwurtz@pacific.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/libraries-articles>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wurtz, M. J. (1987). Route 66: From Beale to Bypassed. , 1–21.
<https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/libraries-articles/107>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Libraries at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Libraries Librarian and Staff Articles and Papers by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact mgibney@pacific.edu.

ROUTE 66

From Beale to Bypassed

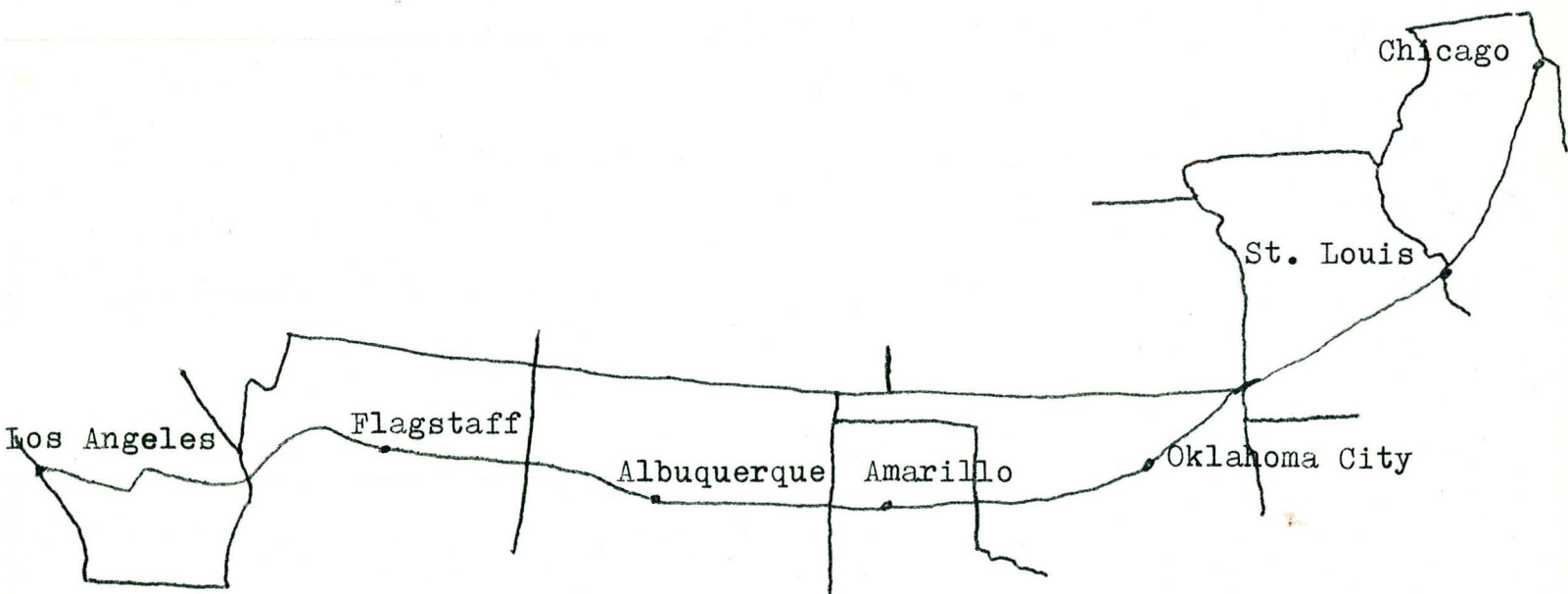
by

Michael J. Wurtz

February 11, 1987

CU Box 6707

523-5794



If you ever plan to motor west,
 Travel my way, take the highway that's the best-
 Get your kicks on Route 66;
 It winds from Chicago to LA,
 More than two thousand miles all the way-
 Get your kicks on Route 66.
 Now you go through St. Looney
 And Joplin Missouri,
 And Oklahoma City looks mighty pretty:
 You'll see Amarillo, Gallup, New Mexico;
 Flagstaff, Arizona don't forget Winona,
 Kingman, Barstow, San Bernardino-
 Won't you get hip to this timely tip,
 When you make that California trip,
 Get your kicks on Route 66.

-Bobby Troup¹

Americans have been traveling west, across North America, for centuries. The goal of Manifest Destiny in the early 1800's was to acquire all ⁽⁶⁶⁾ the land between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans on this continent. To lay claim to this land settlers moved west. After the discovery of gold in California in 1848, there was a need for a trail to transport people to the Far West. This is where the story of Route 66 begins. Since there were at least four trails to the West which became roads, why did Route 66 become the principal road west? ^{In the 1900's} How did it acquire its romantic aspect? Why would the U.S. Government want to, in the end, eliminate it? This paper will attempt to answer all these questions by giving a short history of the exploration and routes along the 35th parallel, then discuss the road, itself and finally explain the Interstate system which made the Route and the romance of 66 obsolete.

yes
why?

Lights?

¹ Iver Peterson, "The End of the Road", Rolling Stone, November 22, 1984, p.42.

EXPLORATION AND SURVEY

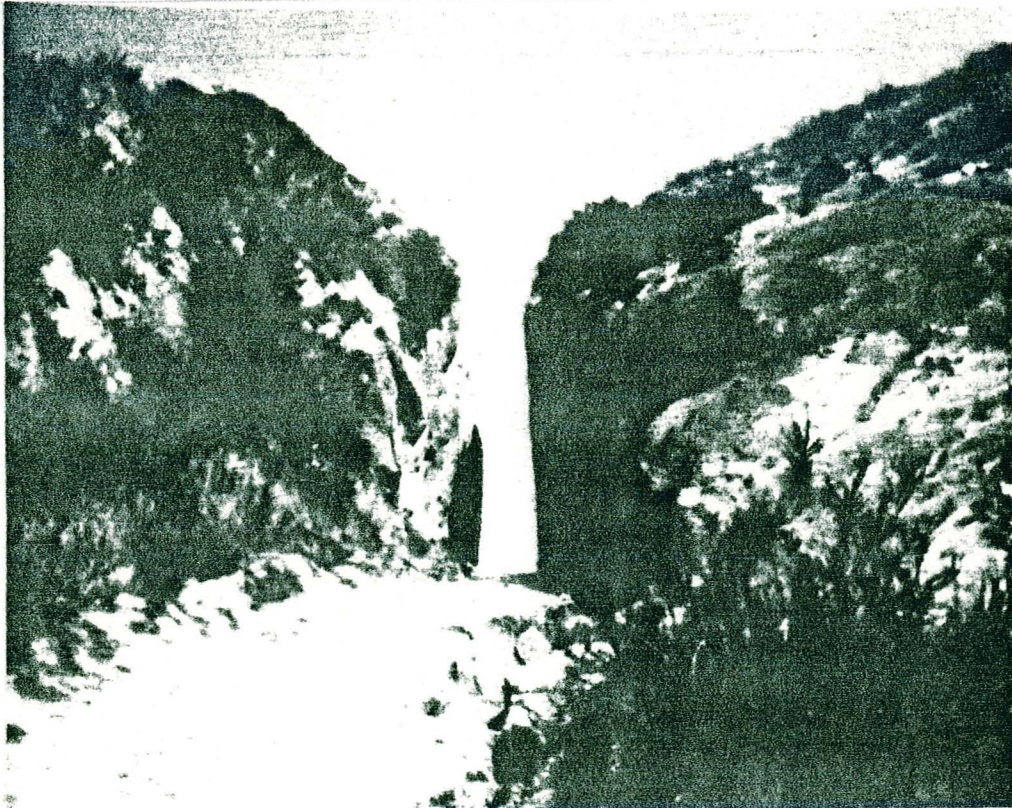
X color

Indians had been using Route 66 centuries before it was given its name. Perhaps they did not follow the exact route, but Route 66 did end up using part of the Osage trail through the Midwest. The first European to approach the route was Coronado in 1541. In 1673, Pere Jacques Marquett and Louis Jolliet used roughly the route between Chicago and what is now the Missouri state line. These Indians and explorers began to define where Route 66 would be. The route west rested for awhile until the Santa Fe Trail was *Think about it!* blazed in the early 1820's. The late 1840's brought the need for a trail to California, and in 1853 at the request of Senator Jefferson Davis, Amiel Weeks Whipple, topographical engineer, with a party of 12 surveyed a route for the railroad to go to the Pacific Ocean. Thus, Whipple became the first to consciously travel the 35th parallel for the sake of a transnational passage. Then the real work began.

Lieutenant Edward Beale of the U.S. Navy set out in 1857 armed with Whipple's survey book and a caravan of camels. Jefferson Davis had been advocating the use of camels in the Southwest for some time. With the help of Turks and Arabs to take care of the animals, Beale cut the trail west. (see photo no.1) *X cut* The camels proved to be very useful for Southwest desert treks. It took only two months and \$60,000 for Beale to go from Fort Defiance, New Mexico to Los Angeles, California. Beale's report to the Congress later "prophetically" stated, "This will eventually be the greatest emigrant road to California."²

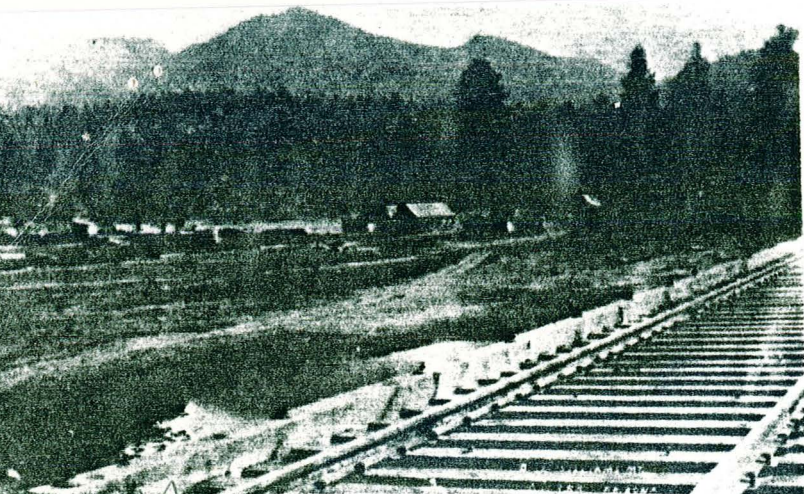
² Eldon Bowman, "Beale's Road", Arizona Highways, August 1984, p.8.

Unfortunately, Beale's road would remain to a large extent dormant because of the Civil War, and the completion of the railroad farther north to San Francisco.



1) One of Beale's road cuts in California.
(Edward Fitzgerald Beale and the American West)

A railroad was the next step in evolution towards Route 66. The Atlantic and Pacific Railroad (A&P) received \$100 million in 1866 to complete a railroad to the Pacific. Due to lack of adquate funding, the A&P could not complete its duty and failed in 1872 with only 300 of the 1800 miles of track laid. With the help of the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad and the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe, the railroad was finally completed in 1883. (see photos no.2&3) The railroad did not put an end to the x RR wagon road, and soon automobiles were driving on Beale's road.



*The St. Louis - San Francisco transcontinental RR
The 35th parallel project 1853-1890*

2) A&P railroad through Williams 1884.
(History of the Atchison Topeka and the
Santa Fe)



3) Flagstaff 1884. (Arizona State Capitol
Archives)

THE NATIONAL ROAD

Here they will revel in the romantic story of the Beginning of American history,....

-Charles Davis³

perhaps don't call 66 until it's 66

Until the 1900's Route 66 had two or three different names.

Sometimes it was Beale's Wagon Road, sometimes the Postal Highway (so named because of the hitching posts for horses) or the Wire road (named for the telegraph lines). Then in 1910, a man by the name of Judge Lowe wanted for the automobile what he called

"an ocean to ocean highway on old trails to be called National Old

Trails Road."⁴ (see photos no. 4 & 5) The route followed was quite interesting, and it ^{of course, (why of course)} improvised on the wagon roads that it crossed. X old trail

For example, the "old" route did not pass through the petrified forest, but the new route did. In Vega, Texas, a well traveled road between two baseball fields became part of the National

Highway. From Kingman to Needles, across the Colorado River, many

^{would} cars chose to ride on the empty flat bed cars of the train to avoid the sand ^{river and its sand} and the river. (In 1916 a bridge was finally built

for cars. (see photo no. 6)) Another adjustment ^{that was considered make} was by the gold mining town of Oatman which had a very steep grade near it. perhaps Footnote instead.

Arizona Highways magazine said it was gravel, but "one does not notice the climb" which is 1000 feet vertical in only four miles.⁵

The National Old Trails Road Association wanted to bypass it.

Why? Fortunately, Oatman's wealth provided enough influence to keep the road from following an alternate route. X Oatman

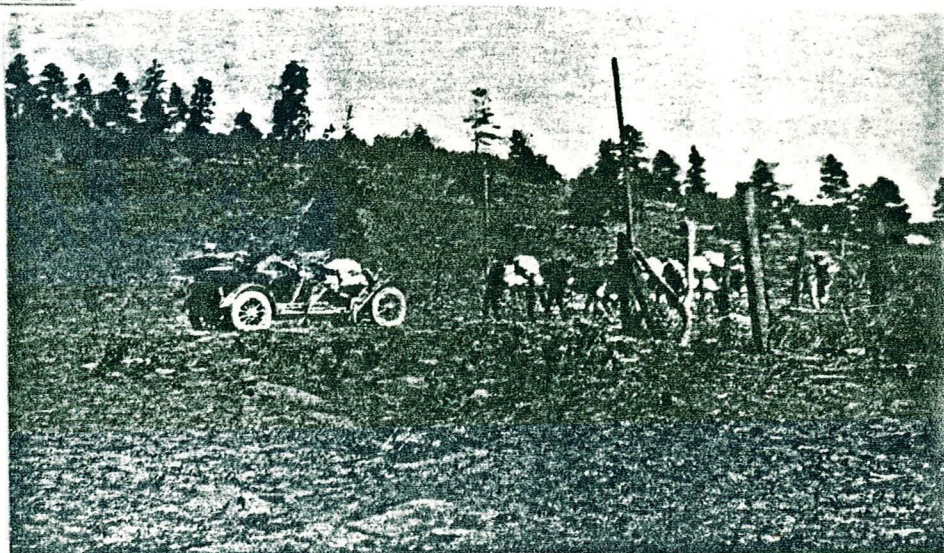
³ Charles Davis, National Old Trails Road, (Washington DC, 1914), p. 40.

⁴ Ibid, p. 33.

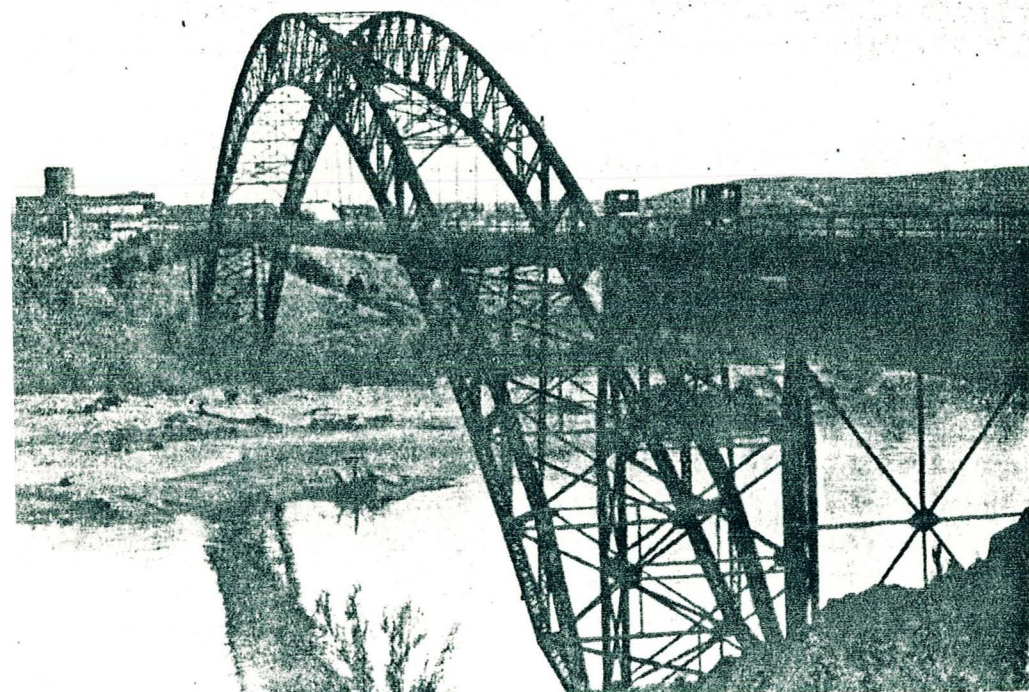
⁵ B.M. Atwood, "From Colorado River East Through Goldfields of Mohave County to the Parting of the Ways: Topock to Ashfork" Arizona Highways, February 1926, p. 20.



4) National Old Trails Road 1913 near Williams. (National Old Trail Road)



5) National Old Trails Road 1913 near Flagstaff. (National Old Trails Road)



6) Bridge across Colorado River 1926. (Arizona Highways)

Soon came the push to get travelers on the "National Old Trails Road." The Arizona section of the road was praised as an excellent area to study geology and archaeology. Michael J. Riordan, of the Riordan Lumber Co. in Flagstaff, Arizona, praised the road in the "National Old Trails Road" book published in 1914. Riordan said that the traveler "will want to see" the Hopi Snake Dance, "Meteor mountain", "Sunset Mountain" or any other points of interest in Northern Arizona.⁶ The U.S. Government still had to be convinced to begin paving a route here rather than to the north perhaps over the Oregon Trail. In 1920, Jehiel S. Davis wrote in

recheck Arizona magazine that there should be six prerequisites to paving a cross-country road: 1) population centers: neither of the routes had really strong population centers, but Sante Fe was big and other towns were growing; 2) topography: the 35th parallel was easily the most gentle with few passes and miles of straight routes; 3) road bed and materials available: the road bed was excellent over some areas and materials were available all along except for some desert stretches; 4) climate: a road to the north *x schen?* would experience much harsher winters with frequent road closures. The southern route is much milder with only intense summer heat; 5) distance: the distance is shortened in the south due to fewer passes; 6) scenery: the southern route has the Petrified Forest, Grand Canyon and everything else Mr. Riordan mentioned above.⁷

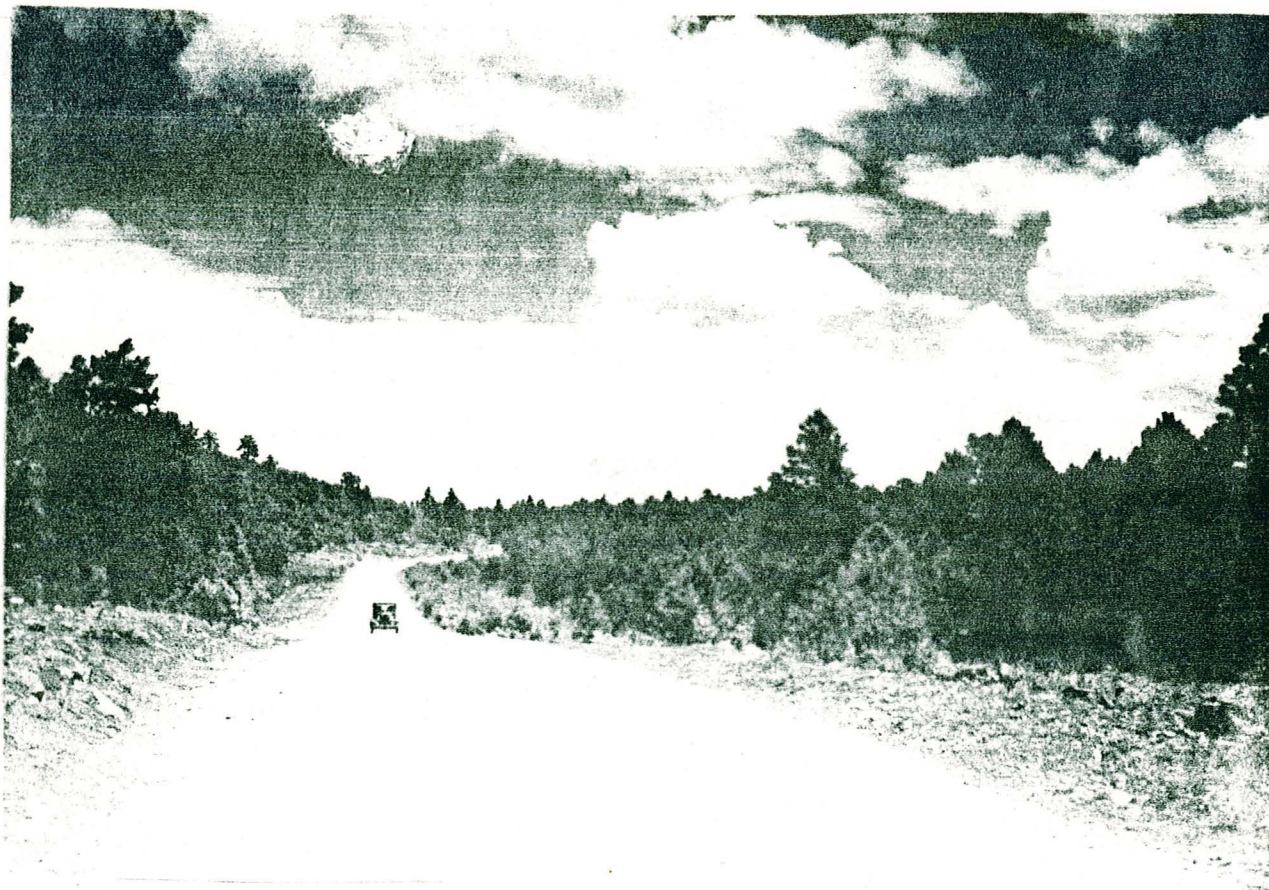
The U.S. Government started the project and called the road U.S.

Not the San Road Route 60. W.R. Hutchins, District Engineer in Arizona, complained that putting a number on it was "taking the romance out of the

⁶ Davis, National, p.38.

⁷ Jehiel S. Davis, "Paved National Highway", Arizona February 1920, p.13.

road."⁶ Later, the romance proved to be only starting when the route was renamed 66 in 1926. (see photo no.7)



7) Route 60 near Williams 1920's. (Arizona State Capitol Archives)

ROUTE 66

Everything loose seems to be sliding into Southern California.

-Frank Lloyd Wright⁷

The paving began in major towns all along Route 66 as early as 1914, when Flagstaff, Arizona, had one whole block paved. (see photos no.8&9) x 2 photos Felons working off time in prison, and just about anyone else who wanted to worked on the paving. ^{dlb 50} In 1932, the

⁶ W.R., Hutchins, "From Flagstaff, Through Scenic Wonderland to Arizona-New Mexico Boundry Line", Arizona Highways, April 1926, p. 9.

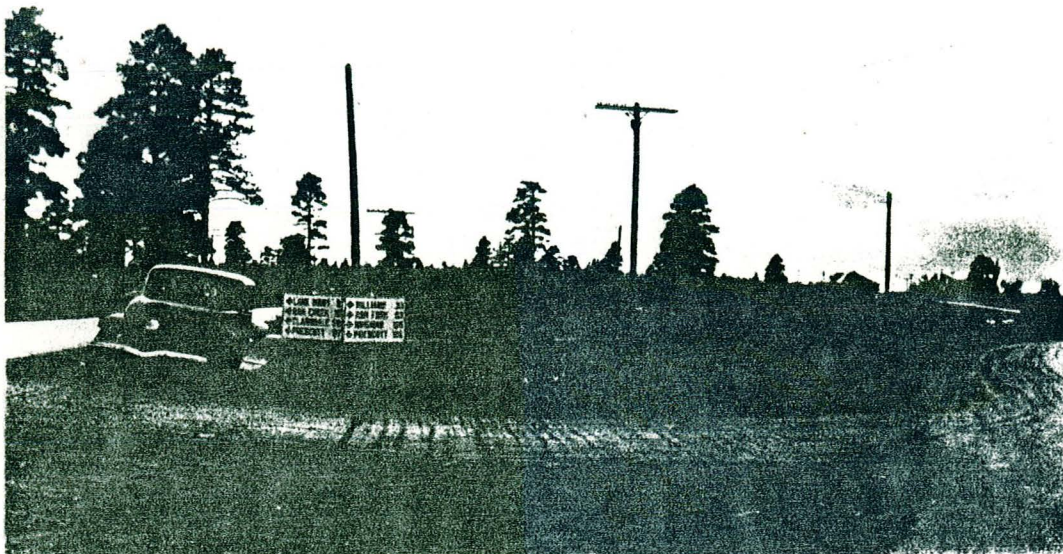
⁷ Thomas Few Jr., "View from the West", American West, September-October 1984, p.6.

paving was complete from the corner of Jackson Boulevard and Michigan Avenue in Chicago to the shores of California at Ocean Avenue in Santa Monica (2282 miles). Of course, paving did not mean much. For instance, the Highway 66 Association, founded to promote the highway, boasted that "concrete is almost one foot thick" in some places while other places along the road were, at best, oiled very heavily.¹⁰ In 1937, the last four mile stretch in the Crozier Canyon of Northern Arizona was covered with concrete. (see photo no.10) It was not until 1939 that the Lincoln Highway in the north would be paved cross-country. This is one significant reason that Route 66 became the primary road west.

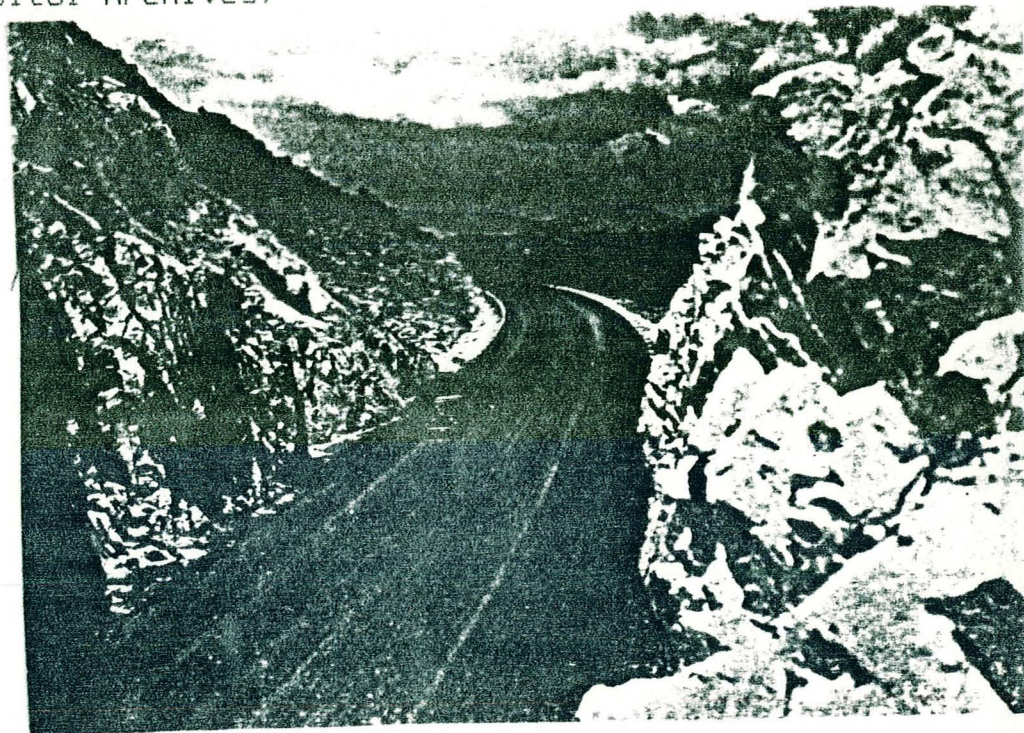


8) Looking north on 66 (Milton Rd.) 1930's
(Arizona State Capitol Archives)

¹⁰ "66" Arizona Highways, May 1955, p.12.



9) The intersection of 89 and 66 1936.
(Arizona State Capitol Archives)



10) Crozier Canyon after paving
1937. (Arizona Highways)

Another factor that stimulated use of Route 66 and began its mostly westward orientation was an event that began on April 14[?], 1935. On that date the first of numerous dust storms swept through the Great Plains and virtually blew the farmers down Route 66 to California. (see photo no. 11) Between June 1935 and June 1936, ^{over 55,000} 56,225 migrants entered California from the 19 "Drought States." They comprised 24% of all enterants into California!¹¹

¹¹ "Drought Refugee and Labor Migration to California in 1936", Monthly Labor Review, 43 (December 1936) p. 1355.

Even though only 66% of those migrants were from Oklahoma all migrants from the Dust Bowl were labeled "Okies." In the five year period after 1935, between 350,000-500,000 "Okies" migrated from the Dust Bowl. Their primary goal was California and their primary route was Route 66. The "Okies" had "unfailing optimism, religious faith and spirit of mutual aid."¹² Route 66 became a home to many of them who had to stop occasionally for work to earn money to continue their trip. Since the "Okies" refused to beg they would trade watches and other items for gas. Datman, the gold mining town mentioned ^{earlier} previously, proclaimed itself the "biggest car cemetery in the U.S," because people would sell their cars there and take the bus to Los Angeles.¹³ The "Okies" would also pile the cars high with personal belongings and then throw up to 15 people on top. (see photo no.12) Then they would go "bouncing up and down like popcorn popping" out to the ^{presumably} better care of California.¹⁴ The influx of "Okies" into California prompted at least one journalist to blame the highway on which they came, ~~on~~.¹⁵ This may have been the first written attack on Route 66.

*Mention
more
attacks
later*



11) Boundary in 1936. (Arizona State Capitol Archives)

¹² Carlton Beals, "American Shantytown on Wheels", Reader's Digest, February 1938, p.76.

¹³ Thomas Pew Jr., "Route 66: Ghost Road of the Okies", American Heritage, August 1977, p.24.

¹⁴ Guthrie, "Talking Dust Blues", Dustbowl Ballads (Folkways Records, 1964)

¹⁵ Paul Taylor, "Again the Covered Wagon", Survey Graphics, July 1935, p.348.



12) "Okies" heading west 1930's. (Arizona State Capitol Archives)

The glamour of Route 66 was hardly tarnished by such attacks. It was a glamour that was destined from the beginning. Jack Cutberth, a barber from Clinton, Oklahoma, was named "Mr. 66" after he promoted the paving of Route 66, and encouraged two lanes and eventually four lanes on the road. Jack's wife, Gladys, said that "65% percent of the nation's westbound traffic" was on 66.¹⁶ (see photo no.13) In addition to the reasons already mentioned, some travelers say that one could avoid trucks if they took 66 instead of the other routes. Also contributing to the

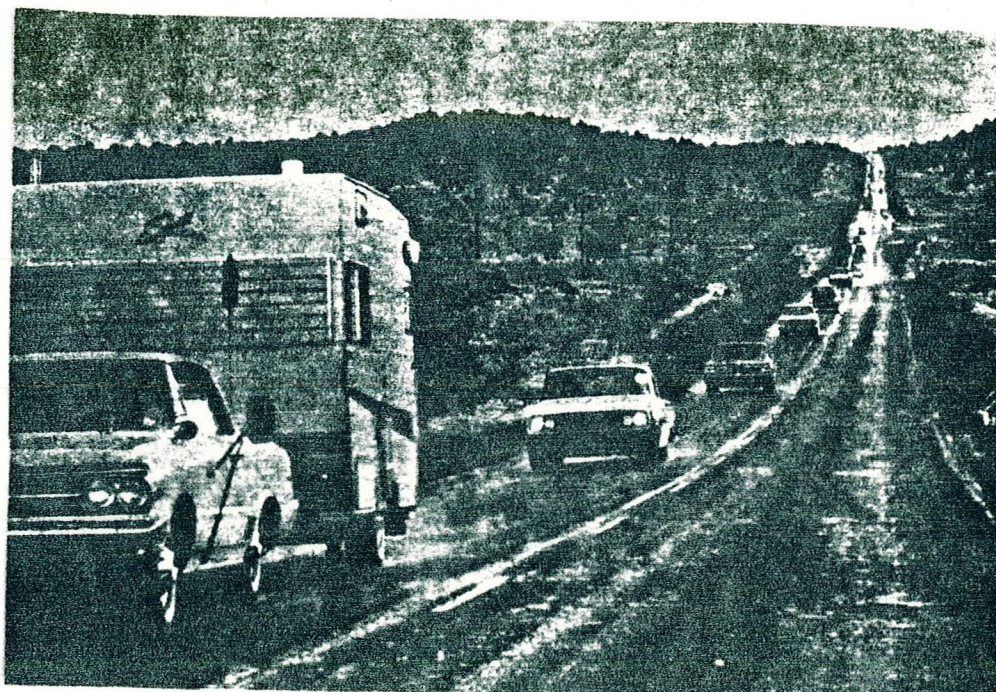
x 66¹ Trailer

need
more
evidents

¹⁶ "Get Your Kicks on Route 66", Arizona Highways, July 1981, p.5.

glamour was the challenge of the grade at Datman. The town provided a 24 hour towing service for cars that could not make it. Greyhound Bus Lines began traveling the Route in the 1920's when commercialism was just beginning. By the mid-1950's Route 66 had Burma Shave signs and motels that looked like "real" Indian teepees. Tucumcari, New Mexico, became famous for its own large

expm → *false* motel with 2000 rooms. Gyp joints and tourist traps were scattered all along 66. Red Grange raced his car across Route 66 in an attempt to win \$25,000 in 1928. People would walk the route, or run it, or even twirl a baton on it in order to get national attention. In 1932 Route 66 was proclaimed "Main Street of America."¹⁷ In 1936, to promote a movie about Will Rogers, Warner Bros. named Route 66 "The Will Rogers Highway".¹⁸



13) Route 66 1965. (Arizona Days and Ways)

¹⁷ "Main Street", Westways, August 1975, p. 53.

¹⁸ New York Times, 6 January 1936.

Route 66 had another, not quite so flattering, name. One in seven accidents in the state of Arizona happened on Route 66.¹⁷ Thus, "Bloody 66" became the road which also had one of the highest rates of illegal passing citations issued to its drivers. The money generated from these tickets was usually the primary source of income for towns along the route.

X corner w/o

Most towns really went for the tourist's dollar with motels, cafes, and gas stations. The need for the west bound tourist dollar is quite obvious if one studies a map of towns along Route 66. It appears that most merchants expanded their towns eastward to be the first business that a traveler would approach from the East. Also very obvious is the high ratio of business found on the north side of the road rather than on the south side, because of their easier access for westbound travelers. Tucumcari is a good example. When the town is divided into four equal quadrants, based on Route 66 running east-west and mid-town running north-south, the northeast section had 35% of the businesses. Silly stunts performed on the road and the businesses on the side of the road are just two more reasons for Route 66's fame. But wait! There's more! There is the amazing media.

According to ... + date

X corner w

The 1920's and 30's brought great changes to the media. Books were printed more quickly, radio could influence a nation and movie theaters showing "talkies" were the place to spend Saturday afternoons. The famous folksong writer Woody Guthrie may have started a trend when he wrote about Route 66 in the mid-30's. There are at least a dozen songs that mention Route 66 indirectly. Guthrie mentioned the "hot and dusty road" in "Do Re Mi", and talks about how the "Okies" "rattled down the highway" in

think is not it

¹⁷ "Route 66: A Transient Way Of Life", Arizona Days and Ways, August, 15 1965, p.36.

"The Great Duststorm."²⁰ He even wrote a song telling the whole story of the Joads. Who are the Joads? The Joads are the family in John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath, a story of an "Okie" family traveling to California on the "Mother Road."²¹ The book was later made into an extremely successful movie, which showed the importance of Route 66. When the Joads' car climbs on to 66 the road is given a place of distinction above the earth around it. Also when "Grampa" dies it seems safe to bury him by the side of the road, as if the "Mother Road" will take care of him. Although Steinbeck's novel is the best known book that includes Route 66, there were others, such as Lelia Bird Angell's When Birds Migrated which also discusses "Okie" migration. In 1946 Nat King Cole sang a song that immortalized Route 66. "Route 66," the song, was written by Bobby Troup while he and his wife were traveling out to Los Angeles. Troup's wife said "get your kicks on Route 66."²² The song affected many who wrote about the road. To quote it at least once seems irresistible. "Route 66," the television show which ran from 1960 to 1964, was a hit. The show revolved around two guys and their corvette zipping up and down the road and seeing action. (see photo no. 14) Perhaps Route 66 has only a fraction of the romance of famous places like New York, but the Western Trails Museum in Clinton, Oklahoma, has set aside an area to show Route 66 in all its fame. Unfortunately, 1956 was the beginning of the end of the road.

Look
this
up!

x TV

x Topograph

well, sorta kinda a week exhibit

²⁰ Guthrie, "Do Re Mi", Dustbowl Ballads.

²¹ Peterson, Rolling Stone, p. 42.

²² Arizona Republic, 14 October 1984.



14) Milner and Marharis in "Route 66" Television show.

THE INTERSTATES

There is

a pervasive, chemical, restroom Gardenia that permeates the clothes and follows the traveler back to his car and for miles down the road.

-Thomas Pew Jr.²³

As early as the 1930's Route 66 had been experiencing growing pains: too many cars for such a small road. In response to the poorly maintained, and the crowded condition of the road, Oklahoma built an express turnpike between Tulsa and Oklahoma city running parallel to Route 66. Also in the 1950's the famous grade near Oatman was bypassed for a much smoother route. This was only the

²³ Thomas Pew Jr., "Goodbye To Main Street", America West, September-October 1984, p.47.

beginning of bypasses along Route 66 which gave way to the Interstate system.

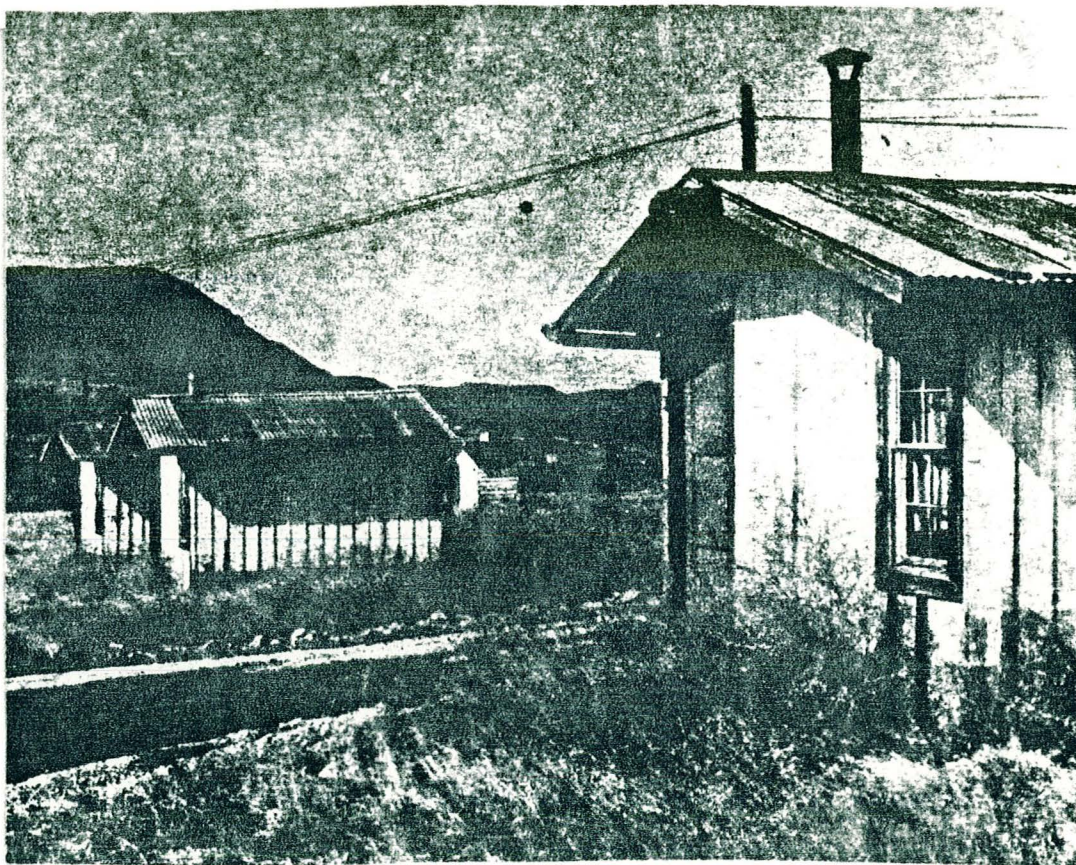
President Eisenhower saw a military and civilian need for an interstate highway network to cover the U.S.. When his Interstate Highway bill passed Congress in June of 1956, it called for 100 billion dollars to be spent on new roads. Twenty-four billion dollars of that amount was to be spent to "modernize or reroute rural interstate highways."²⁴ This plan was to take 13 years and be the largest public works project in U.S. history. *✓ still not done* The new roads were going to be thicker (up to six feet in urban areas) and at least two lanes in each direction. One additional request was also to be met, bypasses were to be constructed around all cities and towns. *X IRK skew*

Five new interstate highways replaced Route 66: Interstate 10 and I-15 in California; I-40 from Barstow, California, to Oklahoma City; I-44 to St. Louis and I-55 to Chicago. On the new roads, a driver could now average 59 miles per hour rather than 38 m.p.h. on Route 66. The worst part of the new roads, however, was that they bypassed the towns which had given the true flavor to Route 66. There was talk of a bypass that would send I-40 up through Las Vegas, Nevada. Fortunately, that plan never materialized; but there were other major bypasses. (see photo no.15) The longest, 84 miles long and 25 miles to the south of Route 66, was between Seligman and Kingman, Arizona. This bypass alienated over nine towns and about 1000 people. Most towns bypassed saw good and bad in the bypasses. The good was the reduction of noise and air pollution. The bad aspect was the loss of business. Most towns

²⁴ "Who Will Get the 50 Billion for Roads", U.S. News and World Report, June 29, 1956, p.27.

along the Route depended on the tourists for income. The last 5.7 miles ~~miles~~ bypassed on Route 66 went through Williams, Arizona. It was bypassed on Monday, the eighth of October, 1984. Williams employed 37.5% of its people in the service industry, and its growth depended on Route 66. On October 13, 1984, Williams had an official opening of Interstate 40. The Reverend Bob Cutlipp blessed the new road; and Bobby Troup was there to sing "Route 66," and open I-40. After cutting the ribbon he said, "I really hope you tear this interstate highway down and go back to Route 66."²⁵ Incidentally, the weather that day was clear with a high near 66 and a low near 40.

54th
anniversary
Sunday



15) Bypassed Winona 1969. (Arizona)

²⁵ Arizona Republic, 14 October 1984.

THE END

END 66

-Old road sign in Santa Monica, California

Route 66's saddest day was that mild day in October of 1984. Travelers will never see roadside businesses with the neon "66" in their logo on I-40, because restrictive regulations on interstate highway advertising were enacted. Some were not so sad to see the road go. Time magazine ran an article in 1965 which said, Route 66 is a "dreary bore with signs like SEE GILA MONSTER 1/2 MILE."²⁶ On June 28, 1985 Route 66 was officially "decertified" and Jack Freidenrich of the New Jersey department of transportation said, "It's all in the interest of progress."²⁷ However, most people are saddened by the demise of the road that ran through eight states. Both Oklahoma and New Mexico are planning memorials to Route 66. ^{Arizona too} In 1980, Missouri removed the signs and offered them to the public. To fill the piles of requests, Missouri had to make 3,000 additional signs to give away. A new highway in Virginia received the 66 designation in the Interstate system. Maybe Bobby Troup can rewrite his song: "It goes straight from Strasburg, Virginia, to Washington D.C., more than eighty miles all the way." ...nah.

²⁶ "Ode to the Road", Time, September 10, 1965.

²⁷ New York Times, 29 June 1985.

Miner, Craig. The Thirty-fifth parallel project 20.
Chawrence; univer press of kanss, 1972) 1853-1890

Shulman, Arthur ab Yungman, Roger.
How sweet it was: TV & pictorial commentary,
New York: Bonanza books, 1966

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Books:

- Bryant, Keith C. History of the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe
(New York; Macmillan Publishing, 1974.)
Davis, Charles. National Old Trail Road (Washington D.C., 1914)
Himmelstein, Hal. Television Myth and American Mind (New York;
Praeger Press, 1984)
Rose, Albert C. Historic American Roads (New York; Crown
Publishing, 1976)
Thompson, Gerald. Edward Fitzgerald Beale and the American West
(Albuquerque; University New Mexico Press, 1983)

Reports:

- Hurst-Roshe and Company. Economic Study of Alternative Proposals
to the Construction of I-40 Between Ashfork and Yucca
Phoenix; Arizona State Highway Comission [1959]
U.S. Department of Transportation. Draft Environmental Impact
Statement of I-40 [1975]
Zickefoose. Economic Survey of Tucumcari, New Mexico 1950-1960
[1962]

Newspapers:

- "Famed in Song, Story and TV, Old 66 Is Almost Gone" Arizona
Republic 26 July 1976.
"Final Chapter is Written for Route 66" New York Times 29 June
1985 p.6.
"End of Route 66" Arizona Daily Sun 14 October 1984 p.1.
"Last Leg of Fabled U.S. 66 Replaced" Williams News 11-17 October
1984 p.1.
"Route 66 Bypassed" Arizona Republic 14 October 1984 p.1.
"66 Named Will Rogers Highway" New York Times 6 January 1936
p.20.

Magazines:

- Atwood, B.M. "From Colorado River DAsT Through Goldfeilds of
Mohave County to the Parting of the Ways: Topock to Ashfork"
Arizona Highways Feburary 1926, p.20.
Beals, Carlton "America's Shantytown on Wheels" Reader's Digest
Feburary 1938, p.76.
Bowman, Eldon "Beale's Road" Arizona highways August 1984, p.8.
Dark, Harris Edward "Route 66: Boulevard to the Golden West"
Todays Health June 1963, p.28.
Davis, Jehiel S. "Paved National Highway" Arizona Feburary 1920,
p.13.
Dedern, Don "Route 66" Arizona Highways July 1981, p.2.
Hutchins, W.R. "From Flagstaff Though Scenic Wonderland, to
Arizona-New Mexico Boundry Line" Arizona Highways April
1926, p.9.
Midgley, G.T. "I, Highway 66" Arizona Highways September 1937,
p.12.
Peterson, Iver "The End of the Road" Rolling Stone November 22,
1984, p.42.